

The Return of Denominational History

David B. Marshall

Volume 39, numéro 2, spring 2010

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad39_2re02

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Department of History at the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (imprimé)

1712-7432 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Marshall, D. B. (2010). Compte rendu de [The Return of Denominational History]. *Acadiensis*, 39(2), 121–130.

The Return of Denominational History

MORE THAN 25 YEARS AGO, the late George Rawlyk observed that there had been little serious attempt in Canada “to explore the often fascinating connection between evangelical religion and evolving Canadian society.” He called for historians of both the Maritimes and Canada to integrate the evangelical tradition into their analysis of historical development and he reassured them that to deal with evangelicalism in a sympathetic yet critical way was not tantamount to academic suicide.¹ Rawlyk, of course, spearheaded a great deal of the scholarship on evangelicalism in Canada in a series of books on religion in colonial British North America as well as a number of edited works on evangelicalism.² This emerging emphasis on evangelicalism was applauded by Terrence Murphy in the pages of this journal. One of the encouraging signs in the historiography of religion, according to Murphy, was “the desire to understand the influence of religion on the behavior of the general population,” and he suggested “it is only by devising means of evaluating popular religious customs and attitudes that we will be able effectively to relate the history of the churches to the social development of the region.”³ In calling for this social history of religion, though, Murphy indicated that denominational histories were of limited value because of their confessional point of view. They were too narrow in their emphasis on specific doctrines and matters of church policy, and elitist in their attention to church leaders. Moreover, they failed to get beyond the pulpit or the central church office. Many other historians have recognized the centrality of evangelicalism in Canadian social and intellectual life, and some of the most innovative work along these lines concerned the Maritime region.⁴ In featuring evangelicalism, historians have, as Murphy suggested, downplayed denominational history as a central theme or organizing principle in their work.⁵

1 G.A. Rawlyk, *Ravished By the Spirit: Religious Revivals, Baptists and Henry Alline* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984), x, 110-11. For a brief overview of Rawlyk's work, see Michael Boudreau, “Reflections on George A. Rawlyk's Contribution to the History of the Maritimes,” *Nova Scotia Historical Review* 16, no. 1 (1996): 1-6.

2 The most notable of these works are G.A. Rawlyk, *Wrapped Up in God: A Study of Several Canadian Revivals and Revivalists* (Burlington, ON: Welch Publishing Co., 1988); G.A. Rawlyk, *The Canada Fire: Radical Evangelicalism in British North America, 1775-1812* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994); and G.A. Rawlyk, ed., *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997). The author of the review distinctly remembers Rawlyk imploring his students to take evangelicalism seriously in his graduate seminar in Colonial North American history at Queen's University in the late 1970s.

3 Terrence Murphy, “The Religious History of Atlantic Canada: The State of the Art,” *Acadiensis* XV, no. 1 (Autumn 1985): 152, 174.

4 Examples of the centrality of evangelicalism in Maritime historical work include the following: E.R. Forbes, “Prohibition and the Social Gospel in Nova Scotia,” *Acadiensis* I, no. 1 (Autumn 1971): 11-36; Ian Ross Robertson, “The Bible Question in Prince Edward island from 1856 to 1860,” *Acadiensis* V, no. 2 (Spring 1976): 3-25; David Weale, “The Time is Come!: Millenarianism in Colonial Prince Edward Island,” *Acadiensis* VII, no. 1 (Autumn 1977): 35-48; Judith Fingard, “Grapes in the Wilderness: The Bible Society in British North America in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History* V, no. 9 (April 1972): 5-31; and T.W. Acheson, *Saint John: The Making of a Colonial Urban Community* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 115-59.

5 See, for example, Michael Gauvreau, “Beyond the Half-Way House: Evangelicalism and the Shaping of English Canadian Culture,” *Acadiensis* 20, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 158-77.

David B. Marshall, “The Return of Denominational History,” *Acadiensis* XXXIX, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2010): 121-30.

The works under review in this essay – which, when taken together, offer a broader perspective that extends to Newfoundland as well as the Maritimes – signal a return to denominational history but one that does not sacrifice attention to the social history of religion. Indeed, it is precisely the opposite. These books – Calvin Hollett, *Shouting, Embracing and Dancing with Ecstasy: The Growth of Methodism in Newfoundland, 1774-1874* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010); Daniel C. Goodwin, *Into Deep Waters: Evangelical Spirituality and Maritime Calvinistic Baptist Ministers, 1790-1855* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010); and Barry Cahill, Lawrence DeWolf, Murray Alary, Elizabeth Chard and Lois Yorke, *The Blue Banner: The Presbyterian Church of Saint David and Presbyterian Witness in Halifax* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008) – demonstrate that attention to denomination is necessary to more adequately understand the religiosity of people in the pews and congregations. These books remind us that historically people have identified themselves either through the church they attend or the denominational background of their family, and that matters of denominational doctrine, confession, sacraments and ritual, and church structure and polity can be of supreme importance. They also remind us that the local church or congregation is the place or setting where Canadians have practiced their religious convictions, as every week people chose a church as the place to worship, encounter the sacred, locate their religious identity, and practice their beliefs through ritual. In addition, the books demonstrate how there was a congregational pattern to religious life in Canada through regular and sustained attendance at local churches. In the close confines of a denomination or local congregation, historians of religion can capture a glimpse of the elusive people in the pews. Yet each of these books also address larger themes in the history of religion, such as the character of evangelicalism and the impact of an increasingly urban and well-educated society on that evangelicalism, by paying close attention to local settings and the experience of one denomination or church.

Taking his lead from the call for historians of religion to focus on the people in the congregations rather than church leadership and institutional development, Calvin Hollett revises the history of Methodism in Newfoundland in *Shouting, Embracing and Dancing with Ecstasy*. The traditional interpretation emphasizes the role of Methodist leadership and particularly a few missionaries, such as Laurence Coughlan, in rescuing the fisherfolk from the moral and spiritual ruin as well as the abject poverty that characterized their isolated and unchurched existence in the remote villages along the barren coastline. Hollett, instead, invites readers to reconsider the literary image of Newfoundland upon which this interpretation is based. He challenges the image of Newfoundland as a barren, impoverished place and suggests that the sea was rich in seals, cod, herring, and squid, while the beaches were profuse in caplin and the hills rich in berries and partridge. As well, there was plenty of timber for all uses. Compared to other pioneering communities in the 19th century, Hollett argues, the image of a particularly harsh, barren, and unforgiving Newfoundland cannot be sustained. And contrary to the popular mythology and historiography, he maintains that Newfoundland was conducive to the spread of a popular religious movement. The fishers and sealers were highly mobile, as they often encountered each other while on the seas, decks, and cod flakes, and it was in these unique settings that Newfoundlanders communicated their religious experiences (5-6, 17-18, 20-1, 31-2).

Similarly, the lifestyle of the fishery and seal hunt contributed to, rather than

impeded, the spread of Methodism. The dangers of the stormy seas, in particular, heightened an awareness of providence, and there were few activities during the 19th century more dangerous than sealing. Those people dependent on the seas for their livelihood developed a keen sense of the precariousness of life. Sealers designed their own rituals to provide comfort and re-assurance as they faced life-threatening conditions. Sermons for sealers or ice-hunters stressed the need for divine benevolence, and were delivered before a party ventured onto broken and uncertain ice during a season of unpredictable weather. Such religious practices or rituals were conducive to the spread of Methodism, and sealing schooners and fishing vessels “became ‘a floating Bethel’ in which Methodist prayer and hymns of praise permeated the vessel.” Methodism flourished, Hollett maintains, “not only in the chapel and with clergy, but in their boats, on their flakes, and in their kitchens in summer and tilts in winter” (120). He suggests that it was a uniquely vernacular Methodism that spread throughout the fishing villages along the coasts of Newfoundland though the exhortation and preaching by the people because it was not clerical leadership or missionary organization that was responsible for this spread of Methodism. As a popular movement, then, Methodism in Newfoundland “stood out ... as a voluntary association of people who regardless of gender or rank, believed that they were called to lend their passion and voice to call others to repentance and joy” (6). Newfoundland, therefore, is a striking example of how Methodism’s flexibility and sensitivity to local popular culture facilitated its spread throughout the North Atlantic world.

Hollett argues that Methodism became a third force in Newfoundland distinctly different from the ultramontanist of the Catholics and tractarianism of the Anglicans. In this regard he draws on William Westfall’s concept of the religion of order and the religion of experience, in Westfall’s *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth Century Ontario*.⁶ Methodism was appealing because of its emphasis on “immediacy fellowship and celebration” in contrast to the emphasis on “transcendence, mystery and distance” of the Anglican Church. Hollett also suggests that Methodism provided fuel for demands for more democratic institutions in Newfoundland. In particular, he notes the coincidence of the Methodist revivals of 1829-32 and the choice of representative government. Methodists openly expressed their displeasure at being excluded from the marriage acts of 1817 and 1824 and, in doing so, they challenged Anglican authority and gave expression to ideas that championed free expression, the end of privilege, and equality of rights. Hollett notes as well the coincidence of the Methodist revivals in Grand Bank and Burin in 1848-49, and in Conception Bay in 1854-55, with the achievement of responsible government in Newfoundland. Methodism, he contends, was at the forefront of movements for reform and democracy in Newfoundland.

As elsewhere, Hollett admits, Methodism in Newfoundland succumbed to the demands of a growing middle class obsessed with respectability. The Methodist emphasis on enthusiastic religion was displaced by a Methodism that emphasized decorum in its worship services.⁷ Increasingly an ordained clergy assumed leadership,

6 William Westfall, *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth Century Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989).

7 On the transformation of Methodism from a religion of enthusiasm to respectability or, put another way, from a movement to a denomination, Hollett’s analysis bears comparison with that found in

and quests for moral reform, such as teetotalism, sapped some of Methodism's energy but not necessarily its popular appeal. The transformation to a respectable Victorian institution allowed Methodism to appeal to the emerging middle class, especially in St. John's, while its roots in the ecstatic religion of experience sustained its popular appeal in the fishing villages and sealing stations along the coastlines.

The transformation from enthusiasm to Victorian respectability also underscores Daniel Goodwin's analysis of Baptists in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. *Into Deep Waters: Evangelical Spirituality and Maritime Calvinistic Baptist Ministers, 1790-1855* looks at the Baptist faith from the perspective of a constellation of its leading ministers: Harris Harding, Joseph Crandall, Edward Manning, Charles Tupper, Ingraham Bill, and Samuel Elder. Of course, many of these divines remind us of the subjects in the numerous works on evangelical religion and the Baptist tradition in the Maritimes by George Rawlyk, whose influence can be clearly discerned throughout this book. But Goodwin's book significantly advances Rawlyk's work.

The most significant aspect of *Into Deep Waters* is the analysis of the sacrament of believers' baptism. Shockingly, the role of adult baptism in the Baptist faith has rarely been explored in the Canadian historical literature; yet it is the cornerstone and major distinguishing feature of the Baptist faith. Goodwin clearly understands that how people practice religion is as important as what they believe. The historiography of Protestantism in Canada, however, has been overwhelmingly shaped by the approaches and methods of the intellectual historian, with far more attention being paid to beliefs instead of worship practices. As Goodwin's detailed description of the sacrament of adult baptism reveals, it is only through close attention to how people practiced their religion that we can truly reach beyond the pulpit and into the congregation of worshippers. Any study of a faith tradition must integrate practices with beliefs, and Goodwin's study is a model of how this can be accomplished.

A central question for Goodwin is "Why [did] baptism by immersion become the identifying evangelical ritual for so many New Lights when speaking in tongues or divine healing or intense sanctification were possible options?" He offers a revision of the prevailing interpretation by George Rawlyk, who suggests that adult baptism became the defining ritual because it was "laden with folk belief and permeated by a sense of almost medieval magic." Rawlyk also maintains that it was practiced by the primitive Christian church (21). Without rejecting this compelling interpretation, Goodwin demonstrates that the ritual of adult baptism represented a break from the troubling and difficult aspects of the Allinist or New Light tradition in the Maritimes. In the wake of Harris Harding's adulterous relationship and the Babcock tragedy of 1805 – where Amasa Babcock, who was convinced that the end of the world was imminent, stabbed his daughter to death in a ritual designed to prepare his family for eternity – many evangelical preachers sought to distance themselves from such antinomian and millenarian excesses. They sought, instead, to anchor their faith in more concrete and orderly doctrine and ritual. Baptism of adult believers, through the ritual of immersion, seemed to be a way to merge intense ecstatic religious experience

with a well-defined discipline and clear doctrine. As Goodwin explains, "The marriage of Allinite religious experience and immersionist baptism created an almost irresistible baptismal spirituality." The appeal of baptism, according to Goodwin, was based on a balancing of religious enthusiasm with the discipline of ritualized belief through the sacrament of adult baptism (23).

Goodwin describes the outdoor baptismal services at great length. In doing so, he demonstrates that this sacrament was "a complex, multi-faceted, and evangelistic practice laden with richly textured layers of personal, social, and spiritual meaning." Such baptismal practices were, after all, dramatic, highly accessible portrayals of one of the best-known events in the life of Jesus; they were a "visible gospel." These baptismal services often lasted for a full day and sometimes for several days. Often they were held at night where torchlights were necessary, making the ritual a spectacular drama for all to witness. Being baptized by immersion upon the proclamation of faith created a "strong sense of religious identity and community among the Baptists," maintains Goodwin, and this new denominational identity was so powerful and meaningful that it transcended ethnic, class, and geographic differences in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and provided people with a powerful sense of identity. During a period of great instability in Maritime society due to factors such as the end of the Corn Laws, the migration of many Irish escaping the famine, and the demise of the age of wind, wood, and sail with the rise of the age of steel and steam, the Baptist faith provided Maritimers with a renewed sense of belonging and fellowship. Just as Rawlyk and Stewart suggested that Alline's Great Awakening provided the Yankees of Nova Scotia with a new identity during the confusing period of the American Revolution and War of Independence, Goodwin suggests, in a similar vein, that the Baptist faith provided many Maritimers with a new sense of identity in period of economic, social, and political transformation in the mid-19th century (233).⁸ Like Rawlyk, Goodwin sees religion as being at the very foundation of the identity of people living in Maritime society.

Goodwin also examines the extensive, protracted, and controversial debate about the sacrament of baptism that embroiled Baptists in the region between 1811 and 1848. A number of key issues were at stake, such as adult versus infant baptism, baptism of believers only, and baptism through sprinkling or immersion. Goodwin grounds the debate in the "intellectual awakening of Nova Scotia." He notes D.C. Harvey recognized this religious debate as part of the "intellectual awakening," but that Harvey considered it to be of marginal importance. Goodwin, however, suggests that the debate about baptism was at the core of Nova Scotia's intellectual awakening. He asserts that the religious exchanges over the question of baptism "excited the minds and passions of Nova Scotians to a degree equal to or greater than the debates over responsible government" (127).

Goodwin's most challenging revision relates to Rawlyk's powerful arguments about the rise of the Baptist Church and spiritual declension. The crisis of identity experienced by the Baptist Church by the 1840s was not due to spiritual decline, Goodwin contends, but instead was the result of a difficult transition. The "Fathers of the Faith" – Joseph

8 George Rawlyk and Gordon Stewart, *A People Highly Favoured of God: The Nova Scotia Yankees and the American Revolution* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1972).

Dimock, Edward Manning, Harris Harding, and Theodore Seth Harding – all died in a short space of time between 1846 and 1855. The passing of this generation seemed to indicate that the evangelical emphasis on an itinerant ministry mostly concerned with saving souls was giving way, at least in the urban centers such as Halifax, Yarmouth, Saint John, and Fredericton, to a more-settled ministry in which pastoral work and moral reform was of primary importance. This more-educated and more-settled ministry had the resources to defend baptism and uphold its traditions of evangelicalism and adult baptism by immersion. Goodwin asserts an underlying continuity between Alline and the Fathers of the Baptist tradition. The latter did not reject the emphasis on conversion or impassioned religious experience; instead, they blended the ecstatic piety of the Great Awakening with greater emphasis on discipline, order, and refinement. Baptismal services were to be orderly and restrained, for in their view unrestrained emotion and behavior distracted people from the gospel and the meaning and significance of the ritual of adult baptism. There was also continuity between the 18th-century fathers of the Baptist tradition and the modern, professional minister of the Victorian period who served the more-educated, respectable middle classes of the cities. According to Goodwin, Ingraham Bill of Germaine Street Baptist Church in Saint John was an avid promoter of temperance, foreign and home missions, and various educational programs. But his preaching was infused with heart-felt emotion. He had the ability to stir his congregations and at times was himself overcome by “the light of the Holy Spirit.” Bill’s concern for education, temperance, publishing, and building the denomination did not displace his respect and recognition of the legitimacy and importance of revivalism. In promoting the religion of greater order and respectability, he did not call for the sacrifice or jettisoning of the more spontaneous and emotional religion of experience. Perhaps the best representative of the links between the Baptist Church of the mid-Victorian period and the religious enthusiasm of the Great Awakening was Charles Tupper, “a brilliant linguist, apologist, and theologian as well as an effective pastor, educator, and denomination builder.” Tupper, Goodwin suggests, developed an understanding of Baptist history that stressed how the zealous religious enthusiasm of Alline’s awakenings acquired “gospel light” by embracing church order, closed communion, and the ideal of an educated ministry.” Goodwin’s important insight that the Baptist tradition in Maritime society had developed into a denomination that merged the “intellectual awakening” with Alline’s “Great Awakening” grounds this innovative work in two of the pillars of Maritime religious historiography (159, 175).

The Blue Banner: The Presbyterian Church of Saint David and Presbyterian Witness in Halifax directly confronts the bias against denominationalism in a much different way. It challenges the historiographical conventions surrounding the creation of the United Church of Canada. James Cameron has suggested that the United Church of Canada was based on a tradition of interdenominational cooperation in education, temperance, missions, and moral and social reform that characterized the evangelicalism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁹ It was a religious institution that valued experience through missionary outreach and moral and social reform over creeds and

9 James Cameron, “Prince Edward Island Methodist Prelude to Church Union, 1925,” in Scobie and Grant, *Contribution of Methodism to Atlantic Canada*, 127. Here Cameron approvingly quotes Marguerite Van Die in Van Die, *An Evangelical Mind: Nathanael Burwash and the Methodist Tradition in Canada, 1839-1918* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989).

doctrines. This view holds that the United Church of Canada was a triumph of the ecumenical spirit over the destructive and narrow aspects of denominationalism. The authors of *The Blue Banner* argue, however, that the advocates of church union, including many Presbyterians, undermined and attempted to destroy Presbyterian witness in Canada in their zeal to create a new national church (42-5).

The narrative of *The Blue Banner* concentrates on the struggle to preserve the Presbyterian Church in Halifax. Those Presbyterians who refused to become members of the new United Church in Halifax were left without a church, property, or a minister. There was not one surviving non-concurring congregation upon which to base a continuing Presbyterian church. Nevertheless, members from all of the nine congregations in Halifax created the new Presbyterian Church of Saint David, which “represented a new birth of Presbyterianism.” The resistance to church union in the Halifax region, according to the authors, climaxed in a revival or great awakening. In their estimation, the Presbyterian Church in Canada was “a grassroots movement of clergy and laity who defied a largely clerical intelligentsia – officialdom and the professoriate – who placed ecclesiasticism before evangelism, theology before doctrine, and . . . machinery before light” (44). The continuing Presbyterians organized a congregation, found a place to worship, and called a minister. Within a year, the new congregation of the Presbyterian Church of Saint David was meeting for worship twice on Sundays, and holding Church School and Wednesday prayer meetings. Also active within the congregation was an auxiliary of the Women’s Missionary Society (46-61).

The authors, though, push their revisionist quest to rehabilitate Presbyterianism to its furthest extreme. “The resistance to church union,” they argue, “had nothing to do with sectarianism, denominationalism, ethnic determinism, or anti-ecumenism. It was neither progressive nor conservative, in theology or ecclesiology. Presbyterians were not fighting for a church – much less a Scottish Canadian church – but for *the* Church, the spiritual body of Christ” (44). Here the authors seem to be suggesting that the Presbyterian Church in Canada was the one true Church and that the new United Church of Canada was somehow apostate. In a remarkable statement, in fact, they contend that church union was little more than a destructive force: “All that the unionists were really capable of doing was destroying the church, and in that they very nearly succeeded. It would have been far more constructive for the Presbyterians to have invited the Methodists and Congregationalists – and indeed all Protestant evangelicals – to join them. Instead, the tide of secularism and “mergemanism” rose so high that it crested a disruption and schism which engulfed and nearly drowned the church” (43). This claim falls into the old style of church history that harkens back to the era of inter-denominational rivalry, where each denomination sought to prove that its doctrines, worship practice, and polity were ordained by God and that other churches were somehow in error (and often egregiously so).

The Presbyterian Church of Saint David, the authors contend, preserved something far more profound than either a specific denominational heritage or some vague feeling about a Scottish identity of “heather, bagpipes, haggis and kilts.” It upheld “evangelical preaching” that featured “Christ crucified.” This church rejected the trends that were diluting the Christian message in modern society, such as a purely social gospel faith, a feel-good kind of pietism that characterized modern urban revivalism, or a secular humanism that was being passed off as the Christian faith.

This claim that the Presbyterian Church of Saint David was a renewal of the evangelical tradition in Canada is best observed from the characterization of its ministers and its worship. The first minister was the Rev. Colin MacKay Kerr, who is depicted as a learned evangelical determined to save people's souls through his ministry and preaching. His sermons were often quite traditional, such as the 1926 Lenten series that included sermons on topics that sounded very much like sermons from the late 19th century; for Kerr, for instance, there was no doubt about the existence of the transcendent or the possibility of the miraculous. But by 1944, Kerr had become a casualty of declining attendance and hard times at Saint David's. His ministry, which emphasized the "more fundamental truths of the faith" such as "sin and redemption," was viewed as being out of touch with the changing congregation. His successor, Frank Lawson, was also an evangelical but of a very different sort. Lawson was a "brilliant pulpit orator," whose sermons were designed to move people. They were characterized by a deep reverence for the Christian faith and simplicity. He did not preach doctrinal sermons; rather he emphasized that the gospel call was for everyone no matter what their creed or denomination. His was a ministry of constant outreach, and he demonstrated that a modern minister could be an evangelical without being a fundamentalist. Lawson frequently delivered his sermons over the radio and they were often printed in local newspapers, and by the 1960s he had become more stridently evangelical in his preaching. He was convinced that the church was losing touch with the people in the pews and with the working man of the new suburbs. He emphasized that everyone needed the "transforming power of Christ" and often preached on the question "Are you saved?" Lawson was at the forefront of the renewed evangelical culture of postwar North American society, and was determined not to be outdone by the more media-savvy crusading personalities like American Billy Graham or Canadian Charles Templeton (85).¹⁰

Separate chapters on worship, music, missionary outreach, and voluntary organizations provide a richly detailed picture of the social and cultural history of a 20th-century urban congregation. The chapter on worship, in particular, chronicles how the ministers at Saint David attempted to keep worship true to the traditions of Presbyterianism. The description and analysis of Holy Communion demonstrates the evangelical character of the Presbyterian Church of Saint David in that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper included a preparatory service before the Sunday morning administration of the elements and Sunday evening thanksgiving. This Thursday or Friday evening service "was a relic of the Long Communion beloved of Gaelic speaking Highlanders, Seceders, and Covenanters" and recognized as a particularly Presbyterian form of evangelical revivalism (154).¹¹ The numerous changes in liturgy, worship, and music at Saint David are carefully documented and explained. This

10 See Cahill, DeWolf, Alary, Chard, and Yorke, *The Blue Banner*, 85. For more on post-Second World War evangelism, see Kevin Kee, *Revivalists: Marketing the Gospel in English Canada, 1884-1957* (Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 143-87.

11 On this aspect of the Presbyterian faith, see Laurie Stanley-Blackwell, "'Tabernacles in the Wilderness': The Open-Air Communion Tradition in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Cape Breton," as well as John Webster Grant, "Presbyterian Revivals," in *The Contribution of Presbyterianism to the Maritime Provinces of Canada*, ed. Charles Scobie and George Rawlyk (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 93-117, 118-27.

attention to detail about worship allows a glimpse into how the people in the pews practiced their faith. Clearly many of the changes at Saint David, such as introducing more contemporary language and music as well as more frequent celebrations of the Lord's Supper, were "necessary in order to reach people who knew little or nothing of the church's traditional language and hymnody." Moreover, the authors maintain that these reforms in liturgy and worship practice were essential to the church's ongoing mission of outreach and evangelization (167).

Despite the success of the Presbyterian Church of Saint David, an ominous, almost apocalyptic tone lurks throughout the book. With an aging congregation and changing immigration patterns, the church has been experiencing a precipitous decline in membership and attendance since the 1960s. Church union did not kill the Presbyterian Church in Canada, but it is now suffering a long, painful demise as a result of deep and powerful historical forces – and Saint David's shares in this demise. But the authors, following Reginald Bibby's recent studies on contemporary religion and the possibility of church renewal, are not pessimistic.¹² They believe the example of the Presbyterian Church of Saint David can serve as an inspiration and foundation for resilience within the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Their optimistic faith in the future of Presbyterianism in Canada rests in their history of Saint David. In June 1925, Presbyterians in Halifax were without a place of worship or a minister; but out of the near destruction brought by the disruption of church union, the Presbyterian Church re-emerged. This reviewer, however, is not so optimistic about the future of the Presbyterian Church. The forces at work undermining Presbyterian witness since the 1960s – demographic and immigration trends in particular – have been far more powerful than what was unleashed during the crusade for church union.

The revisionism of these books is solidly within the spirit of scholarship that Rawlyk advocated, for he was on a quest to understand the intricacies of religious belief and practice among the people of the Maritime region. His own work on Henry Alline, as well as other leading figures in the Maritime evangelical or revivalist tradition, was constantly under revision. These historians can be considered his disciples, and with these works Maritime and Newfoundland religious historiography remains at the forefront of the historiography of religion in Canada. Each one of these books shows the way to a deeper understanding of the evangelical tradition. But each one does so within the strict confines of a denominational framework. Calvin Hollett's *Shouting, Embracing and Dancing with Ecstasy* demonstrates the deep historical roots of Methodism in the popular culture of outport Newfoundland and in doing so makes a significant revision regarding the spread of Methodism. His book is a model in its ability to get beyond the leadership of a church and look at the religious beliefs and activities of the people. Daniel Goodwin's *Into Deep Waters* not only better explains the emergence of the Baptist church as the pre-eminent Protestant denomination in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, but it also helps to more adequately account for the appeal, significance, and controversy surrounding the sacrament of adult baptism. Although Goodwin's study is organized around the lives

12 See especially Reginald Bibby, *Restless Gods: The Renaissance of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Stoddard, 2002).

of a number of prominent “Baptist fathers,” his close attention to a specific ritual provides a fascinating glimpse into how the Baptist faith was lived or experienced by its believers. Finally, the multi-authored *The Blue Banner* focuses on one congregation in Halifax while challenging the historiography of church union in Canada and providing a profile of how a congregation has faced the numerous economic and secular challenges during the 20th century.

Denominational history has been heavily criticized because its institutional emphasis impeded the investigation of the religiosity of the people in the pews. More than a generation of historians took up the call for an end to narrow denominational history and pursued broader themes of religious history, including the character of evangelicalism and the secularization debate. These books under review, however, indicate that there is still much to be learned through close attention to denominational history. While *The Blue Banner* contains powerful elements of the old denominational history that was primarily concerned with justifying the existence, traditions, and doctrines of a particular church, *Shouting, Embracing, and Dancing with Ecstasy* and *Into Deep Waters* are exemplary denominational studies. Through detailed attention to rituals, liturgy, doctrine, and activities within Methodism and Baptism, they reveal a great deal that is new about the character of evangelicalism and popular piety from the late-18th century to the middle of the 19th century as well as the impact of Victorian respectability on evangelical enthusiasm and life within the churches.

DAVID B. MARSHALL